BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Best Place on Earth

2008-00765/

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2007AG0039-001461
Nov. 13, 2007

Ministry of Attorney General

GANGS, GUNS TOP CONCERNS AT FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL MEETING

VICTORIA – British Columbia will be pressing to step up the war against gangs and guns at tomorrow's federal/provincial/territorial talks in Winnipeg. Attorney General Wally Oppal will be calling for increased efforts to apprehend and prosecute gang members, more money from Ottawa to fight crime and mandatory sentences for gun violence.

"We're working with police agencies to turn up the heat on combating gang activity in B.C.," said Oppal. "We need Ottawa's help in making sure that they are prosecuted and that the courts are backed up by laws that recognize the seriousness of gang violence. I'll also be seeking clarification on B.C.'s share of the federal government's recent announcement for new police officers."

BC's anti-gang priorities at the federal-provincial conference include:

- pushing for Criminal Code amendments making gang murder a first-degree offence;
- supporting Bill C-2's mandatory jail terms for illegal and prohibited firearm possession; and
- facilitating cross-jurisdictional return of fugitives and cracking down on warrant evasion.

"Everyone has a right to safe streets and communities. One way to achieve that is to strengthen recognizance orders to protect the people from offenders whose sentences have expired, but who continue to present a public menace," Oppal said. "Likewise, I want to see a process for granting indeterminate sentences to dangerous offenders who breach supervision orders while on community release."

Legal aid and violence against women will also be important issues at the Winnipeg conference.

The Province will address long-standing issues affecting B.C.'s legal system, including finalizing the proposed, new two-year agreement on legal aid funding from the federal government. Canada's contribution to legal aid funding has not increased since 2003/04 and there is a growing need to provide greater assistance to those who are struggling to afford legal assistance.

-more-

B.C. is also pursuing Criminal Code changes to allow police to testify on behalf of victims of domestic violence who are reluctant or refuse to testify and seeking support for changes that will enable judges to limit testimony in order to speed up the trial process and get matters before a judge more quickly.

The federal, provincial and territorial justice ministers meeting will be held Nov. 14 to 16.

-30-

Media contact: Dave Townsend
Public Affairs Officer
Ministry of Attorney General
250 387-4962

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.